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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS
IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO COLONIAL
AND OTHER DEPENDENT COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES

Written statement submitted by Pax Christi International, a
non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement,
which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council
resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[8 April 1997]

The human rights situation in Burundi

1. Since the coup d'état of Major Buyoya in July 1996 there has been a consistent pattern of gross human rights violations in Burundi. Although Buyoya justified his coup by confirming that he would end massacres immediately, not one single kind of human rights violation has ceased or even diminished following his seizure of power.
2. Massacres of unarmed Hutu by the military took place in almost all the provinces of the country except in the capital of Bujumbura, which is almost completely ethnically purged. Victims are mainly women, children and elderly people. They are all - even small children - killed under the pretence that they are rebels or are helping the resistance movement. To give only one example: on 13 December 1996, soldiers killed 107 persons of Ruvyagira village, Mutambu municipality, Rural Bujumbura province. The list of victims includes 53 children, almost all of them killed by bayonet. A baby of six months was thrown in a river after his mother had been murdered.

3. Usually the military commits massacres in retaliation for attacks carried out by one of the military resistance groups on army posts. After the fighting the soldiers invade adjacent villages, killing the unarmed population.

4. The military tries to create an ethnic conflict between Hutu and Tutsi in order to justify the power of an army consisting almost exclusively of Tutsi with the leadership of one single Tutsi clan. People in power find it easy to gain international sympathy by declaring themselves a minority which has to defend itself. In fact, it is the army itself that suppresses the majority ethnic group as well as democratic and peaceful Tutsi. Political and army leaders know perfectly that if they let the population of both ethnic groups live peacefully together, there would be no use for an army at all. As proof of this policy, in December 1996 the military killed 30 persons in Mutaho, Gitega province. Among the 13 women murdered there were also 4 women who were Tutsi living together in harmony with their Hutu neighbours. The military thought it could not tolerate this. It is estimated that at least 30,000 civilians have been massacred by the governmental army since Major Buyoya's seizure of power.

5. Since the start of this year the Hutu population has been forced to leave their homes and fields in great number and to concentrate in camps. The Government admitted a figure of 200,000; the United Nations Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs in East Africa, Mr. Martin Griffith, speaks of about half a million. In these regrouping camps people have neither sufficient food nor medical supplies or services. Thus, they die from famine, malnutrition and all kind of diseases, a process reinforced by the fact that most of them have to live in the open during the current rainy season. While they have to stay in the camps, the military, with the help of certain Tutsi, seizes their harvests for its own use. If anyone refuses to go to a camp or tries to escape or even just to go home to get something to eat, he is regarded as a rebel and killed. Thus, the army killed 83 people in Gitaza, Rural Bujumbura province, on 12 February 1997 because they tried to get food from home. People in the camps are defenceless and have no chance to escape from what the soldiers have reserved for them. More than 500 were killed on 19 and 20 March 1997 in the camps of Kaburantwa, Gasenyi and Ruhagarika all in the province of Cibitoke. The dead bodies were thrown into mass graves.

6. About 5,000 members and followers of the Frodebu party, which won the elections of June 1993 by an overwhelming majority, and related parties, have been arbitrarily detained and often held for years without legal action. This has been and still is a means to weaken the democrats. Even the highest-ranking representatives of democracy like the President of parliament are constantly heard by the public prosecutor under the invariable allegation of genocide. In recent times Hutu members of the security services have also been arrested as they are suspected not to be loyal to the putschist Government.

7. Almost everybody arrested is ill-treated or tortured. Torture usually takes place in camps of the gendarmerie or police posts. Even well-known personalities like the executive secretary of the majority party Frodebu, Domitien Ndayizeye, has been tortured in order to make him reveal the party computer's password.

8. Disappearances are very common in the countryside. The military at the camp at Rumonge are well known for killing people during the night. The victims are detained in the daytime but the military pretend that they never detained them. But even in the capital the military disappear detainees. As an example, the Burundi Human Rights League ITEKA, in December 1996 spoke of 11 persons having disappeared after detention in Bujumbura.

9. The most urgent steps the Commission should take in order to stop human rights violations in Burundi are:

(a) Deployment of a substantial number of human rights observers to be located in all provinces;

(b) Calling an extraordinary session of the Commission on the Great Lakes Region.
